United Nations E/CN.17/2008/13/Add.2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
10 January 2008

Original: English

Commission on Sustainable Development
Sixteenth session
5-16 May 2008
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Thematic cluster for the implementation cycle 2008-2009 — review session

Discussion papers submitted by major groups

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

Contributions by children and youth**

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–7	2
II.	Africa	8–15	3
III.	Agriculture and land	16–19	6
IV.	Drought and desertification	20–25	10
V.	Rural development	26–35	11
VI.	Conclusion	36–37	13

* E/CN.17/2008/1.

** The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

08-20490 (E) 010208

The present paper was prepared by young people and youth organizations from around the world, who volunteered to participate in the Ad Hoc Working Group of the Youth Caucus in order to submit a well-written and thoroughly researched position paper to the Commission on Sustainable Development. The Working Group would like to acknowledge the energy, commitment and hard work of the members of the drafting committee, all those who submitted comments and suggestions and concerned organizations.

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio Earth Summit) made monumental progress in the acknowledgement of young people as part of the global equation for sustainable development. While in 1992 young people accounted for approximately 30 per cent of the world's population, today they account for 50 per cent. Many years and resolutions after the adoption of Agenda 21 in 1992, real change in the inclusion of young people as participants in the decision-making process that affects their communities and their lives is something that young people continue to hope for.

2. Today's young people have inherited a world they did not contribute to shaping:

(a) More than 1 billion people live on less than $1 a day and 238 million of them are young people;

(b) Some 8,000 people die every day from AIDS;

(c) More than 2.4 billion people lack access to clean water.

3. The environment is no exception, with young people not allowed to voice their concerns and speak up for themselves and future generations.

4. All over the world, at any given time, there are scores of young people responding to the development challenges within their communities. In spite of their lack of recognition, their message remains the same: youth want to be involved, and the social, environmental and political imperative of young people's participation will need to be acted on by serious development actors nationally and globally.

5. The reasons for ignoring young people in the global efforts for a sustainable and just world seem irrelevant when youth-run programmes have longer-term sustainability by including the next generation; and greater inclusion and participation would allow for stal and ownership, preventing disengagement and ensuring a safer, more equitable future for all.

6. The opportunity presents itself yet again at the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. While we battle the scourges of global poverty, climate change and deadly pandemics, let us not forget the role that young people have to play — and have been playing — towards building our collective future.

7. As youth, we have inherited not only the misfortune of a warming planet we did not contribute to shaping, but also the wisdom of societies that have lived in harmony. In preparation for the review year at the sixteenth session, we voice our concerns with the desire to be heard, but we are also ready to hear the stories others are waiting to tell.

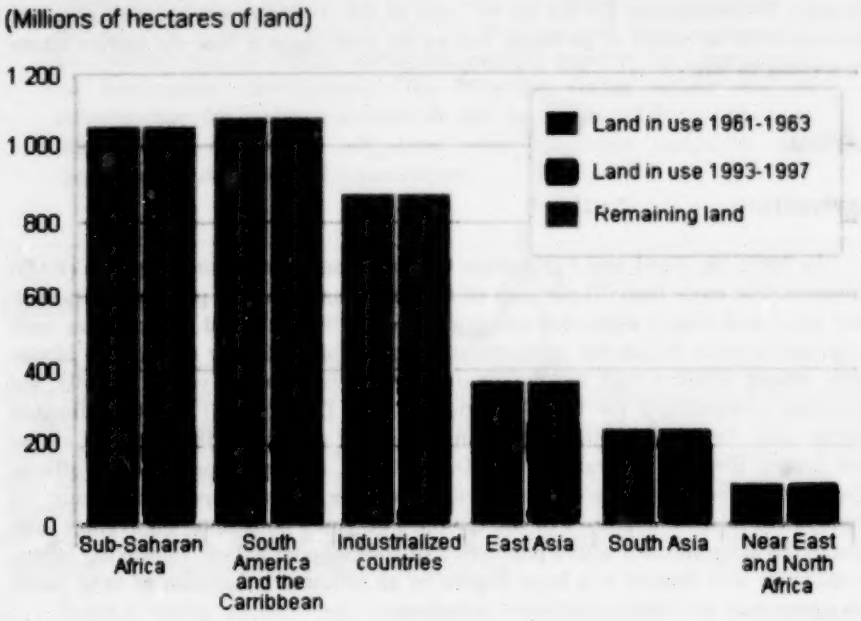
II. Africa

A. Agriculture

8. In 2003, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimated that more than 70 per cent of the sub-Saharan Africa population lived in rural areas and largely depended on agriculture for its livelihood. In countries such as in sub-Saharan Africa the agricultural sector employs 65 per cent of the labour force, among which a high percentage of women, children and youth. In 2005, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimated that in Latin America and the Caribbean, the sector employed 58.8 per cent of the total labour force in the rural areas. Despite that, a mere 4 per cent of official development assistance goes to agriculture, the most important source of employment in most countries of the region. The youth constitute, on average, one third of the economically active population of sub-Saharan Africa. Improving labour productivity will depend to a large degree on an efficient integration of rural youth into agriculture and other rural-based industries.

9. The situation described above points to the urgent need for Africa to develop its agricultural sector. The figure below shows that Africa and Latin America are the only continents that still have large amounts of unexploited land. There is also a huge opportunity to increase agricultural yields without having to increase land acreage. Africa's fertilizer usage is extremely minimal when compared with other continents. Abundant water resources are another asset that is heavily underutilized in Africa. Less than 5 per cent of sub-Saharan African agriculture is irrigated. Irrigation and an increase in fertilizer can greatly improve grain production and not only increase food security but also rural incomes.

Potential available land for agriculture



Source: FAO; BBC News.

10. Climate change threatens the success of the agricultural sector and others that rely on the capacity of ecosystems to support livelihoods. Most climate change models predict increasing temperatures, decreasing rainfall and increasing rainfall variability (more erratic and extreme, like the recent flooding that devastated crops in several African nations). Climate change affects agricultural productivity, access to and availability of water, disease prevalence and rural-urban migration as farms fail and workers seek employment in urban areas. Anticipated regional effects of global climate change, coupled with many of the issues highlighted below, render farm communities and the agriculture sector extremely vulnerable.

11. As we can see, agriculture has a pivotal role to play in many regions of the world and there are many problems plaguing this sector, especially in developing countries, because of the lack of planning and public policies. Some of these problems we have identified below:

(a) Injustice and inequity, which exacerbates widespread poverty and hunger;

(b) The devaluation of farming by manufacturing and a rapidly expanding urban population;

(c) Less importance given to agriculture and rural communities due to urbanization, which is reflected in the very low public spending for farming and at times reaches only 4 per cent of total Government spending;

(d) The production of ethanol, biofuels and products for exportation, which may threaten national food security in some countries by prioritizing trade inflows over domestic food needs;

(e) The devastation of forests, monoculture, loss of biodiversity, soil deterioration, shrinking sources of water and excessive use of agrochemicals, which lead to the unsustainable use of natural resources;

(f) Low salaries and lack of benefits, technological training and assistance and education for rural workers;

(g) Damage to natural resources, poor information, lack of education and infrastructure, which often result in food insecurity, premature deaths and mass migration to urban areas in search of a better life.

B. HIV/AIDS

12. The scourge of HIV/AIDS is now becoming a global phenomenon, although Africa has been the most affected continent. The pandemic is reducing productivity, weakening the population's ability to respond and recover from natural shocks, ultimately killing off the most productive demographic group of the population and, according to James Morris, former Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP), sowing the seeds of future famines. HIV/AIDS has a severe impact on human capital, especially the youth in sub-Saharan Africa. Half of all new infections are in youth between the ages of 15 and 24. Nearly 2.5 million youth were infected with HIV in 2001. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is forcing more and more children and juveniles between the ages of 10 and 19 into the labour force as the number of adults age 20 to 35 fell ill or died.[1] The chance to earn income is extremely important to an infected youth facing economic problems, or to a youth supporting a family when parents have fallen sick or died from HIV/AIDS. In 2005, the United Nations estimated that only 10 per cent of people in Africa infected with HIV/AIDS were able to access antiretroviral drugs. It is also estimated that sub-Saharan Africa will lose 26 per cent of its agricultural labour force to HIV/AIDS by 2020. The United Nations further estimated that for highly affected countries like Botswana HIV/AIDS would actually change the demographic structure of those countries. The most productive age would be reduced and the very old and the very young would be left responsible for driving economic growth.

13. Current challenges for the fight against HIV/AIDS include:

(a) A lack of HIV/AIDS education among African populations, in particular youth under the age of 30, who constitute 50 per cent of new HIV infections;

(b) The stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, which interferes with information-seeking and treatment-seeking behaviour;

(c) A lack of access to affordable/free antiretroviral medication for HIV positive individuals, due to various factors, including trade-related intellectual property rights and a lack of investment in public subsidies for antiretroviral medication for HIV positive individuals.

[1] International Labour Office, *Global Employment Trends* (Geneva, 2003), ISBN: 92-2-113360-5.

C. Education

14. In 2001, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that just less than 60 per cent of the African population was literate. Yet education is crucial in development. It enables the population to make good use of agricultural extension information, read and adopt new farm technologies, and learn how to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS. An educated mother will be in a better position to understand the importance of nutrition for her child. Educating the youth will safeguard the future by better equipping the population to engage in economic activities and in gainful employment, while simultaneously reducing crime rates and other non-productive behaviours.

D. Focus areas

15. Sustainable economic development in Africa can only be achieved through:

(a) A higher investment in primary and secondary education, especially for girls, to safeguard their future and ensure that they are adequately equipped to make economic contributions in the future;

(b) A holistic approach in agricultural investment that links development strategies with climate change adaptation and includes components such as new farm technologies suitable for Africa, improved irrigation and natural resource management, infrastructure and market intermediaries that work for poor farmers in the context of a changing climate;

(c) Combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic by increasing access to health care and awareness education, including providing support to effective peer-led models of HIV education programmes, campaigns aimed at addressing the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS, and providing comprehensive scientific and accurate information and services on sexual and reproductive health and rights;

(d) Stronger governance from African Governments and greater investment from developed countries, in addressing Africa's development and the Millennium Development Goals.

III. Agriculture and land

16. There is a need for the recognition of agriculture as a key component in ensuring global food security in international planning and policymaking arenas. The processes of globalization and modernization have seen mass migration to urban centres, which has led to unsustainable living conditions for millions concentrated in informal settlements. At the same time, agriculture and rural development have been largely overlooked as a sector for economic growth. Given the interlinkages between agricultural systems and food security, poverty, health, environmental sustainability, biodiversity and employment, the conditions and policies affecting this sector are a fundamental concern in national development strategy planning.

17. A core element of strategy for sustainable development is the reform of agricultural policies and processes: food production and agriculture are the world's single largest source of employment; and nearly 70 per cent of the poor in

developing countries live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Although farming has been devalued by manufacturing and a rapidly expanding urban population, agriculture still represents the fundamental basis of economic and community life for most of the world's inhabitants. Underlying ethical concepts of equity and justice have an important role in agriculture, whereby a focus on production must not neglect access to food, information and to the means of production.

18. Despite this pivotal role, poverty is often concentrated in rural/agricultural areas. Damage to natural resources, poor information and inadequate infrastructure often result in food insecurity, premature deaths and mass migration to urban areas in search of a better life. The farmer must be accorded his or her rightful place in the processes of development and civilization building: as the villages are reconstructed, the cities will follow.

19. Many problems emerge from the neglect of the agricultural sector; many solutions lie in reinvigorating this core human activity. Emerging issues facing the agricultural sector and land include:

(a) Their inherent injustice and inequity which affects rural communities and exacerbates widespread poverty and hunger;

(b) The inherent unsustainability of existing farming practices, as driven by economic forces, leading to soil deterioration, decreased productivity, diminishing water sources, disposal of reusable organic waste, biodiversity and bioenergy as well as increasingly adverse effects of climate change. Sustainable systems of agriculture are key to sustain the planet's ecological and climatic balance;

(c) There is a need for a more holistic, view of agriculture. Agriculture also includes aquaculture, fishery, management of resources and pastoralism. The recognition of pastoralism as a viable and necessary form of agriculture may better inform the development and implementation of agriculture interventions and policies;

(d) Financing for small-scale, rural farming is an imperative as a model of decentralization to bring about greater rural access to food sources, the preservation of traditional knowledge and seeds, encouraging high productivity in low productivity areas and generally increased participation of small producers and improving food security. Such financing also supports human working conditions on farms such that labour is not exploited by the force of low profit margins;

(e) The urbanization process has seen a trend in decreasing investment in agriculture and rural communities, as reflected in low public spending for farming, which at times reaches only 4 per cent of total Government spending and continues to be taxed at relatively high levels. The lack of technological training and assistance and education is a notable obstacle in moving towards more effective and higher-yielding farming methods;

(f) Access to education and participation of women and youth is essential in this undertaking, since they are most often the main agents of sustainable development and change at the grass roots and the first ones affected by agricultural policies and plans;

(g) The increasing use of genetically modified seeds may have a serious and adverse impact on land biodiversity and the future capacity of the land to generate food crops;

(h) The need for farmers' control of, and access to, the land that they cultivate, so as to bring about a motivated participation that supports a more ecologically sustainable farming practice as well as greater long-term economic gains to lift farmers out of poverty.

Box 1

Case study: Targeting increases in girls' attendance in school: "*animatrices*" in Mali and the Niger

In pastoralist communities in north-eastern Mali and western Niger, Oxfam GB is working with school and community *animatrices*, or "female mobilizers", in order to encourage higher rates of attendance and participation by pastoralist girls in formal schooling. The participation of girls is hindered by a range of issues, including early marriage, excessive workloads, popular beliefs that women are inferior to men and less intellectually able and widespread poverty. The *animatrices* help to tackle some of these issues by working with parents and teachers (mostly male) to change negative attitudes towards girls and schooling, and to reinforce the right to an education. By working in the school and with the teachers, they have helped to make the school environment more friendly to girls, and the walk to school safer.

By working closely with parents and mobile households, the *animatrices* have helped fathers and mothers to understand the benefits of schooling for their daughters. As relatively well-educated local women in paid employment, the *animatrices* serve as positive examples for local girls. They have also encouraged the participation of women in parents' associations and women's groups, where women from otherwise scattered households welcome the opportunity to come together to exchange views and to be educated.

Box 2

Case study: Encouraging youth to enter agriculture in the United States of America

The Nebraska Agricultural Youth Institute and Iowa Agricultural Youth Institute were established 36 and 27 years ago, respectively. Their goal is to educate and enlighten high school students on the importance of agriculture to their states and their nation. They both offer four-day retreats where students can discuss and learn about agricultural career options and important issues surrounding agriculture. They focus on:

(a) Career development: providing information on the many possibilities of careers in agriculture;

(b) Leadership: farm management training and group activities;

(c) Education: specific seminars on farm safety and family farm relations;

(d) Socializing and networking: visiting Government agriculture offices, round-table discussions with prominent figure, dances, banquets and awards.

Box 3
Case study: Tutorial Learning System (Colombia)

The Tutorial Learning System (SAT) of Colombia has developed a methodology that makes it possible for any individual — youth or adult — from the most remote rural region to have access to high quality secondary-level education. The creative manner in which the benefits of learning are shared is complemented by a content that organizes in an imaginative manner the relevant knowledge — much of which is generated through actions carried out by the Foundation for the Application and Teaching of the Sciences in the varied areas of rural development.

SAT provides an innovative approach, using a curriculum adapted for country life and delivered via non-governmental organizations, offering new opportunities for 15,000 students in rural Colombia. What has made the method so successful is not only that the curriculum is uniquely formulated for rural students — although that is largely responsible for its effectiveness, it is also the manner of its presentation. Using a series of highly interactive workbooks, specially trained tutors present the curriculum. The tutors themselves often come from rural areas and make themselves available on a flexible schedule to meet the needs of rural students.

Taken all together, the programme represents an entirely new approach to rural education and to addressing the problems of rural life in Colombia.

Rather than dividing subjects up into traditional categories, like biology, mathematics and social studies, the SAT curriculum takes an integrated approach that combines all three subjects in, for example, a discussion of how insect populations reproduce (biology) exponentially (mathematics) given the right conditions (social studies and ecology). The result is an integrated curriculum that makes sense to farmers raised in rural areas — and still covers the same subjects with no loss of quality.

In addition, the curriculum contains a strong measure of moral education. The curriculum is organized around the all-important concept of service to the community. It also emphasizes the importance of such basic moral values as honesty, trustworthiness and trusteeship, as well as basic ecological principles. In its totality, the result is a curriculum that stimulates people to action.

IV. Drought and desertification

20. About 3.6 billion of the world's 5.2 billion hectares of useful dryland for agriculture has suffered erosion and soil degradation. In more than 100 countries, 1 billion of the 6 billion world's population are affected by drought and desertification, forcing people to leave their farms for jobs in the cities.

21. Desertification is devouring more than 20,000 square miles of land worldwide every year, and affects 74 per cent of the land in North America and more than 2.4 million acres of land (73 per cent of it drylands) in Africa.

22. Climatic changes can trigger drought and desertification processes, but human activities frequently are the proximate cause. Overcultivation exhausts the soil. Deforestation removes trees that hold the soil to the land. Overgrazing of livestock strips the land of grasses. According to a United Nations study, about 30 per cent of Earth's land — including 70 per cent of the dryland — is affected by drought. Every day, about 33,000 people starve to death.

23. Given this scenario, and considering such factors as rising temperatures, growing population, migration patterns and so on, it is imperative to rethink current policies to enhance general understanding and propose actions to counterbalance the effects of such scourges which are often referred to as "the greatest challenges of our time". According to the Convention to Combat Desertification, there is a strong need for an engaged dialogue at different levels — and possibly, involving different stakeholders — to combat droughts and desertification, and to create transnational policies and increased cooperation. As the Convention to Combat Desertification also points out, at the moment, there is a multiplicity of development and environmental frameworks, each with their own orbit and little interaction, which may de facto undermine the prospective outcomes in the long run, and the easiness of living in the short term.

24. Those bearing the brunt, for the most part, are impoverished communities, and they need to be taken into consideration when it comes to land management and issues, which rarely happens in developing countries, where most of the land is owned by the State. The majority (approximately 70 per cent) of the world's population lives in rural areas, and as a matter of fact, they are the ones most affected by drought and desertification in general.

25. The following issues should be taken into consideration while trying to curb the effects of drought and desertification:

(a) Engagement of local communities. Apart from taking productivity and natural resources into consideration, local policies aimed at effectively combating drought and desertification should also consider the needs of current and future generations, if a real change is to be achieved. As many communities face such issues daily, living off the land and cattle (pastoralism), the same can be included in managing lands and resources locally. Also, communities should be empowered to take charge of their future and that of the lands they use, and Governments should consider societal and economic aspects while drafting policies. For example, pastoralism is an important feature of the sub-Saharan economy, and including pastoralists communities in strategies to curb droughts is an effective way of managing drylands;

(b) Environmental migration and scale of desertification. As approximately 30 per cent of the Earth's land is affected by drought and desertification and the trend will not be reversed owing to the increase in temperatures, the decrease in rainfalls and a general exploitation of drylands, it is expected that more and more people will be forced to migrate to more fertile lands or to places where water abounds. According to many researchers on the issue, water — or the lack thereof — will be a major force behind migrations in years to come, thus affecting areas that will become overpopulated and may risk facing the same situation of the areas people migrated from;

(c) Local actions and transnational/regional cooperation. Local actions are the first main steps in combating drought and desertification and, as stated above, should include the main stakeholders — communities experiencing it — to be effective. However, as desertification affects many countries at different latitudes and continents, many Governments decided to draft a common action plan with countries of the same continent: for example, in Latin America, where desertification affects about 75 per cent of all the drylands, Governments have drafted common plans focusing on legislative and institutional frameworks simultaneously addressing environmental degradation, poverty and social inequality at multiple levels. It is also important to note the ongoing relationship between countries belonging to different regions or continents (South-South cooperation) when it comes to development issues and natural resources management (Latin America/Africa or China/Africa cooperation, for example);

(d) Biodiversity loss. Droughts are in general considered the forerunners of desertification, and as there are very few ways to counterbalance these (including reforestation, rainwater harvesting and, in some cases, desalination) an early response is the best way to curb their devastating effects. Climate change, droughts and desertification are inextricably linked to the loss of biodiversity as the increase in overall temperatures has had a major impact on soil and cultivations. Soil conservation, adequate land management and natural resources programmes are therefore of paramount importance to ensure food security and overall well-being (not to mention the continuity of local traditions);

(e) Other major development issues. Other issues that should be taken into consideration include the overexploitation of drylands and natural resources by Governments and corporations, food security, the societal and economic impact of droughts and desertification and the use of genetically modified organisms as a panacea to counterbalance the effects of droughts on local populations and famine.

V. Rural development

26. The imperative of rural development is underscored by its potential to address the major concerns of the world's poor, alongside strengthening of North-South development cooperation. In essence, a core goal of rural development is poverty reduction or eradication. At the same time, as stated in Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration, rural poverty is a multidimensional problem with intersecting factors, such as low incomes, inequalities in access to productive assets, low health education and nutritional status, the degradation of natural resources, vulnerability to risk and a lack of political power to address the problem.

27. Recent millennium development indicators have indicated that global poverty rates are falling, led by Asia. However, millions more people have become further entrenched in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, where the poor are getting poorer. Progress has been made in terms of hunger and malnutrition, but slow growth of agricultural output and expanding populations have led to setbacks in some regions. Since 1990, millions more people are chronically hungry in sub-Saharan Africa and in southern Asia, where half the children under the age of 5 are malnourished.

28. Further, there is a disjunction between Governments' commitments towards sustainable development and the realities of practice on the ground. This presents an increasingly severe depletion of the Earth's resources, without corresponding mitigation as well as adaptation efforts for intervention. This has the greatest impact on the poor, whose day-to-day subsistence is often directly linked to the natural resources around them.

29. Current education policies may need reviewing, as existing models of teaching curricula, many passed down from colonial times, are not relevant to the local context of many rural communities. As a result, rural-urban migration, especially among the young, is occurring at an unsustainable rate, which not only saturates city areas and creates slums, but also deprives rural communities of the human and intellectual capital and the local and/or indigenous knowledge needed to bring about long-term rural development.

30. Furthermore, trade models have an immense potential to bring about equitable development that will enable healthy and sustainable growth of rural areas, provide more incentives for rural communities to participate in the development of their local environment and protect the livelihoods and control of rural trades people and farmers over their land and their lives.

31. These strategies work not only to address problems in rural-urban migration, but also work alongside other important strategies such as investing in infrastructure and services in rural communities, which are equally essential for sustainable rural development.

32. In addition, although access to safe drinking water has increased, nearly half of the developing world lacks toilets or other forms of sanitation. Some 2.6 billion people do not have access to basic sanitation, which continues to have an impact on public health and related costs, human well-being, and broader development in rural areas. National development plans need to integrate strategies that address sanitation; one possible way is to use microcredit models not only to build financial capital and address youth unemployment, but also to enable rural communities to lift themselves out of poverty.

33. The need for adaptation becomes increasingly important as climate change poses a new threat to rural development and the timely achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. It is widely accepted that populations in developing countries are among the first to confront the negative effects of warming temperatures, higher sea levels and erratic rainfall. The most vulnerable groups within these countries, among them the rural poor, women and youth, are least able to adapt. Development will not be sustainable unless communities are made more resilient in the face of a changing climate.

34. With regard to addressing the issue of rural development, Bangladesh provides a case in point. Poverty reduction is the central challenge for Bangladesh. To reduce

poverty in the country, it is crucial to develop the rural areas. For this, Bangladesh needs to accelerate the growth of agriculture and the non-farm sectors, improve the quality of social services, ensure proper functioning of the rural institutions and expand the rural infrastructure.

35. Despite significant growth potential, several constraints exist, preventing Bangladesh from realizing a sustained and high agricultural growth. In order to manage the resource base efficiently and to ensure the sustainable exploitation of agronomic potential, the agricultural development strategy should focus on the need to increase agriculture's competitive edge by combining coherent policies, incentives and programmes to pursue efficient production practices, remove supply-side constraints and provide a supportive macro and trade environment. Additionally, any agricultural development strategy should be closely linked with national measures for adaptation to climate change, including among other strategies, ensuring that investments to improve productivity support adaptation to climate change.

VI. Conclusion

36. **As young people, we have a long and uncertain path ahead of us. For our swiftly warming planet and for our own children's children, we have much to fear, at the same time that we have much to hope for. The need to move rapidly towards environmentally and socially sustainable economies, through a just transition, is the challenge of our generation and time is running out.**

37. **It is imperative that we participate actively in the decision-making processes because of the implication of today's decisions on our lives and for our future. We look forward to continued engagement on the issues of agriculture, land, rural development, drought and desertification before, during and following the sixteenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. We wish for our world leaders to live up to the promises that have been made to secure a more just world, and that their actions at the Commission will give us hope for a better future.**